

Education

Adult school tries to keep up

Burbank campus that's been around for 81 years has had to raise tuition and reduce offerings because of budget cuts.

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BURBANK — Burbank Adult School has seen funding slashed and enrollment drop, but administrators, staff and students soldier on.

Legislators in Sacramento voted to cut funding to adult schools by 20% and gave school districts flexibility to eliminate adult education entirely in the next four fiscal years as a way to reduce the impact of state funding cuts. The 81-year-old school has 800 fewer students enrolled this year compared with last, administrators said. Classes that used to be free are not. Tuition is up, class time shortened, and course offerings have been reduced.

"As we made cuts to programs, we tried to focus on keeping programs that supported the districts' overall goal for student achievement and learning," Principal Cherise Moore said. "If we're putting education reform at the K-12 [level], we're missing a whole group of workers who are beyond that and can't benefit from that."

Burbank Adult School offers 200 individual classes for more than 6,000 students who range in age from 18 to 88, Moore said. Programs range from career and technical education, to English as a second language, to high school proficiency diplomas. There are also literature and writing, math, parent education and apprenticeship classes.

"A lot of those programs help people get a second start in life," Burbank Board of Education President Dave Kemp said. "When you go to a graduation over there and see how they beam for finally accomplishing something, it's an amazing event. And we don't want to see that ever go away. It's too important."

Molly Sundar teaches students who are working toward their general education diploma. The classes require a fee, and were cut by 2 1/2 hours.

"The students I have really value their education and are fighting really hard to be educated," she said.

"We had to be flexible for some students who are on [Supplemental Security Income] and wait for the next check."

The school offers several trade programs that prepare students for jobs. Lisa Powell, an instructor, said she has seen nursing courses reduced by half to just one program.

"A lot of people are trying to get into the health-care field and really want to be a certified nurse's assistant," she said.

"A lot of people are coming in because of the changing economy."

Students looking for work or who need retraining have found a silver lining to economic recession in job placement programs funded by the economic stimulus and recovery package that passed in February. As a result, Burbank Adult School offers programs in pharmacy technician training and cable installation free of charge. The grants also provide case management and job location assistance.

"When we've completed the first round of training, these folks will have a job and no longer be dislocated workers," Moore said. "We are hopeful that if we show the programs are a success and we get people who are out of work trained and working, the federal government will realize this is a good investment they should continue to make."

As long as classrooms are full, Trisha Tachibana, an instructor, said the value of education remains.

"The budget cuts have fortified my desire to continue doing what I do," she said. "My students are all immigrants who demonstrate to me by their daily attendance and earnest hard work that beyond paying taxes, they hope to engage fully and productive in civic life."

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